

OFFICER DECISION RECORD

CMT Officer: Carol Pilson, Corporate Director & Monitoring Officer	Service: Planning
Lead Officer: Matthew Leigh, Head of Planning	Delegated Power Being Exercised: Part 3 Responsibilities for Functions, Table 5, Para 8 – to approve any action within their functional area up to the value of £250,000 Part 3 Responsibilities for Functions, Table 5, Para 8 – to approve any action within their functional area up to the value of £250,000
Subject of Decision: Planning Validator Tool	

Decision Taken:

To procure the AI Validator tool to enhance accuracy, efficiency, and consistency in the validation of planning applications. This decision includes authorising the associated expenditure, contract award to the selected supplier and commencement of integration and staff training to ensure the tool is fully operational within the agreed timeline.

Reason for the Decision:

The decision to procure the AI Validator tool was approved by Corporate Management Team (CMT) in support the Council's commitment to modernising and automating key processes, as outlined in the previously agreed Artificial Intelligence (AI) – Automation of Processes report. This initiative aligns with the Council's strategic objectives to improve service efficiency, accuracy and consistency while reducing manual workloads and the potential for human error.

The AI Validator tool will specifically enhance the planning application validation process, ensuring faster processing times and improved data quality. This supports the Council's policy to embrace innovative technology solutions that contribute to better customer service and operational resilience.

Furthermore, the investment in AI technology is consistent with national and local government digital transformation policies, promoting smarter working practices and enabling the Council to respond effectively to increasing service demands within existing resources.

Alternative Options Considered (if appropriate):

Continue with existing manual validation processes:

This option was rejected due to ongoing inefficiencies, higher risk of human error and inability to meet increasing demand for timely and accurate processing. Maintaining the status quo would not support the Council's digital transformation goals.

Use alternative AI tools:

The Council was unable to find any other AI validation tools available on the market.

Legal and Procurement Implications

The Council has a statutory duty under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 and related legislation to properly validate planning applications before they can be formally registered and processed. Accurate and timely validation is essential to ensure compliance with legal requirements and to avoid delays or

refusals based on incomplete or incorrect submissions.

The procurement and implementation of the AI Validator tool will improve the validation process by automating key checks, increasing accuracy, and reducing processing times. This supports the Council's legal obligations while enhancing service delivery and customer experience.

The procurement of the AI Validator tool has been carried out in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules including confirm compliance with procurement thresholds and legal requirements.

Financial Implications

The proposed contract has a maximum value of £52,500, covering the period up to April 2028, with optional 1 year extension costing £15,000. This expenditure will be funded from Horizon Fund. It is anticipated that the introduction of the tool will increase capacity within the team, resulting in efficiencies that will offset its cost. Over time, the investment in the tool is expected to become cost neutral through a reduction in staffing requirements and associated costs.

Any Other Implications

The implementation of the proposed tool is expected to enhance the team's capacity and efficiency. As a result, it is anticipated that there will be a reduced need for staffing resource to manage workloads. This will allow for a realignment of existing staff duties or a reduction in temporary staff/additional hours, contributing to overall cost savings and improved operational effectiveness.

Background/Reports/Information considered and attached:
N/A

Lead Officer's Signature:

Matthew Leigh, Head of Planning

Date:

14 January 2026

Please forward to Democratic Services upon completion

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**Date copy passed to
Democratic Services**

14/01/25

Implementation Date:

(if not called-in)

**(Allow 5 clear working days after publication
of decision)**

Circulation: Democratic Services, Portfolio Holder, Officer and Accountancy.